

# The **WRITING** CENTER

**Elftmann Student  
Success Center**

**A Guide On  
How To:**

## **Proofread Your Writing**

- What is Proofreading?
- What are Some Strategies?
- What are Some Common Errors?



# Proofreading Your Writing

Technical programs require precise measurement, attention to the smallest detail, and adhering to defined standards. The same skills used to fulfill these needs can be used to proofread a piece of writing.

## What does proofreading look like?

Proofreading means checking for errors in grammar, punctuation, or capitalization that might hold back or cover up what you want to say. Grammar, punctuation, and capitalization help the reader “hear” things like pauses or voice inflection.

When proofreading, check for “little” errors that may have been missed during your initial writing and revisions.

## What are some strategies I can use to proofread?

**Patterns of errors.** Writers often make the same mistakes over and over again until they learn how to correct them. Use your **past assignments** to look for patterns of errors you commit; this is a good starting place for proofreading. Because there are several “little” things to check for, proofread for **one at a time**. This strategy can help you decide which to choose first.

- **Use your computer’s resources.** Beware that AutoCorrect, Spell Check, and Grammar Check do not catch and correct all errors. However, they are useful for what they’re programmed to do, as long as they are not the only tools you use. Another often overlooked tool is the **Search** function, which can be used in conjunction with our first strategy. For example, if you know that you often confuse “it’s” and “its,” you might tell Search to find every one and easily check for yourself if it’s correct.

**Read your writing backwards.** This is especially useful for checking your **spelling and capitalization**, because the context of what you have written isn’t there.



**Read your work aloud.** A technique of professional writers is to read their writing aloud. When reading aloud you may find passages that you have to re-read because they sound awkward or cumbersome. This is usually a good indication that you will need to rework the sentence and consider modifying your punctuation.

**What are some common errors I should look for?**



	Common Error	Ways to Fix it
Commas	<p><b>Overuse of Commas</b> – sentences are unclear or choppy because of unneeded commas</p> <p><b>Comma splices</b> – two controlling ideas in one sentence separated by only a comma</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Make sure there's one controlling idea per sentence; anything else should be its own sentence.</li> <li>• If each side of the comma can be its own sentence, separate or add a connecting word:           <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>◇ <b>subordinating conjunction:</b> although, because, unless</li> <li>◇ <b>coordinating conjunction:</b> for, and, nor, but, or, yet, so</li> <li>◇ <b>transitional expression:</b> in addition, however, in contrast, as a result</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Read the sentence aloud; places where readers take breaths naturally are usually places where writers use commas.</li> </ul>
Apostrophes	<p><b>Ownership</b> – a noun owns another noun</p> <p><b>Contraction</b> – two words joined to form one</p> <p><b>Note:</b>            "Its" = belonging to it            "It's" = contraction of "it is"</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Read for only words with an "s" at the end. If you've added an apostrophe, ask yourself what that word owns.</li> <li>• Read only for apostrophes. Ask yourself which two words are being contracted.</li> <li>• Pronouns do not use an apostrophe to show ownership.</li> </ul>

<b>Usage &amp; Grammar</b>	<b>Fragments</b> – incomplete idea	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Find the subject of your sentence (what your sentence is truly about) and find what action is being performed.</li> </ul>
	<b>Pronoun Usage</b> – replaces a noun phrase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Avoid “you” and any first person nouns; reword so the sentence centers on the true focus.</li> <li>Find what each pronoun refers to, and be sure it’s clear to the reader.</li> </ul>
	<b>Run-On Sentences</b> – more than one controlling idea in one sentence or not enough commas.	 rewrite the sentence.
		 divide the sentence into two separate sentences.
		 add a comma and a conjunction to clarify meaning.
 complete sentences; complete sentences.		
<b>Capitalization</b>	<b>Capitalization</b> – the name of a specific thing; the beginning of a sentence	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Any names of people, places, or titles you cite should be capitalized.</li> <li>Check each start of a sentence.</li> <li>Check for words like “my” or “the” or “a/an” before the word in question; if you need to use them, don’t capitalize.</li> </ul>

## References

- How to proofread. (2009). Informally published manuscript, The Writing Center, University of Wisconsin, Madison, WI. Retrieved from - <http://writing.wisc.edu/handbook/proofreading.html>
- Purdue University Online Writing Lab. (2011). General writing. Purdue Online Writing Lab, Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana. Retrieved from - <http://owl.english.purdue.edu/owl/>

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